

Mr. WEBER of Texas. Madam Speaker, I rise today to recognize the outstanding work of Mayor Becky Ames, the 41st mayor of Beaumont, Texas.

Since being elected, Mayor Becky Ames has spearheaded several initiatives to better the Beaumont area, such as establishing the One Stop Shop in city hall to help businesses and homeowners with their various needs.

Becky has also helped develop the 311 call centers to help residents with non-emergency issues.

Mayor Ames' most significant contributions to our district include the emergency preparation and management before and after several tropical storms and hurricanes that have impacted Beaumont. Mayor Ames' experience and leadership during these storms were instrumental to recovery efforts and restoring Beaumont's infrastructure. I have seen them up close and personal.

I recognize and I thank Mayor Becky Ames for her many years of selfless service to Beaumont and our 14th Congressional District of Texas.

Madam Speaker, I congratulate Becky on her well-earned retirement.

RECOGNIZING SHERIFF CRAIG NOBLES

(Mr. CARTER of Georgia asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. CARTER of Georgia. Madam Speaker, I rise today to recognize Sheriff Craig Nobles of Long County, Georgia, for his heroic actions saving 22 dogs on May 24, 2021.

Sheriff Nobles was responding to a brush fire and discovered 22 dogs tied to trees in the wood line. After containing the scene, first responders successfully saved all 22 dogs that are now safe and healthy.

The First Congressional District is fortunate to have Sheriff Nobles serving and protecting not only the people in the community, but man's best friend as well.

After seeing the faces of the 22 dogs, I am thankful for the first responders who rescued these dogs that are now able to find a loving home.

I am proud to rise today to congratulate Sheriff Nobles, the Long County Sheriff's Office, and the Long County Fire Department for their great work in saving these precious animals.

RECOGNIZING CHASE GROGAN

(Ms. FOXX asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Ms. FOXX. Madam Speaker, recently, my friend Jean Donaldson was driving home late one afternoon and had a tire blow out.

Jean stopped in the parking lot of the business Clean & Dry, where Chase Grogan, an employee of the business, noticed her plight and offered to help.

Despite it being near quitting time, Chase insisted on helping Jean and pro-

ceeded to change her tire so that she could get home. Jean was, of course, grateful and offered compensation, which he declined.

We often come to the floor to praise people who have done extraordinary acts, and we should continue to do that. However, it is good for us to acknowledge all the Chase Grogans of the world who, every day, do extraordinary acts of kindness with little recognition.

By acknowledging Mr. Grogan, we are acknowledging all who do those kindnesses every day.

CONGRATULATING VICKI CHRISTIANSEN

(Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. Madam Speaker, I rise today to celebrate and congratulate USDA Forest Service Chief Vicki Christiansen on her recently announced retirement.

Chief Christiansen has dedicated 40 years as a professional forester, wildland firefighter, and land manager.

I have had the great privilege of working with Vicki and appreciated her visit to the Allegheny National Forest.

While visiting, it was made clear her passion for problem-solving, connecting people with their natural resources, and her commitment to local collaboration.

The ANF is Pennsylvania's only national forest, and it plays a vital role in our communities throughout the region.

Vicki's work as USDA Forest Service chief focused on saved natural resources in ways that promote lasting economic, ecological, and social vitality for all communities.

Madam Speaker, I thank Vicki Christiansen for her leadership, dedication, passion, and advocacy for our Nation's national forests in rural areas. May she enjoy her retirement.

RECOGNIZING FLAG DAY

(Mr. LAMALFA asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. LAMALFA. Madam Speaker, today we celebrate the adoption of the stars and stripes as the official flag of our Nation. In 1777, six years before the end of the Revolutionary War, is when it was adopted by Congress.

Over the past year, however, we have seen a constant stream of disrespect for our stars and stripes.

We expect the flag to perhaps be beaten and burned on the streets of Beijing or in the Middle East or other cities of our global adversaries, but we do not expect that to happen within the United States.

This past year, we have all fought against the raising of political flags in

military bases and atop our embassies and consulates. Our flag is the only flag that belongs above those buildings.

Our flag is a symbol of hope and unity.

I hope today, of all days, we can remember who fought to raise the flag and why.

REAFFIRMING TRANSATLANTIC SOLIDARITY

(Ms. KAPTUR asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Ms. KAPTUR. Madam Speaker, as co-chair of the bipartisan Congressional Ukraine Caucus, I rise to reaffirm transatlantic solidarity in advance of President Biden's meeting with Russian dictator Vladimir Putin.

I am so thankful to President Biden, who is personally committed to liberty in Ukraine. I was proud to travel with him and Senator McCain to Ukraine in 2015, for President Poroshenko's inauguration.

As President Biden knows well, Vladimir Putin is an enemy of liberty. Ukraine faces its seventh year of brutal Russian aggression that has led to over 14,000 deaths. Putin's thugs gunned down liberty defenders like Boris Nemtsov and so many more freedom lovers.

Madam Speaker, I include in the RECORD Amnesty International's deeply troubling human rights report on Russia.

RUSSIA

Russian Federation
Head of state: Vladimir Putin
Head of government: Mikhail Mishustin
(replaced Dmitry Medvedev in January)

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed chronic under-resourcing in health care. The authorities used the pandemic as a pretext to continue the crackdown on all dissent, including through amendments to a vaguely worded law on "fake news" and tightening restrictions on public gatherings. Peaceful protesters, human rights defenders and civic and political activists faced arrest and prosecution. Persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses intensified. Torture remained endemic, as did near total impunity for perpetrators. The right to a fair trial was routinely violated while legal amendments resulted in a further reduction in judicial independence. Reports of domestic violence rose sharply during COVID-19 lockdown measures, although the draft law on domestic violence remained stalled in Parliament. LGBTI people continued to face discrimination and persecution. Thousands of labour migrants lost their jobs during the pandemic but were unable to leave because of border closures. Evidence emerged to corroborate allegations of war crimes by Russian forces in Syria.

BACKGROUND

The economic downturn, underpinned by falling oil prices, dwindling investment and foreign sanctions, and exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, led to a further impoverishment of a growing proportion of the population. Discontent widened, with a slow but steady increase in protests. The government continually faced, and ignored, mounting allegations of corruption at all levels. Measures announced by President Vladimir Putin and his government, like extended fully paid leave for all workers in response to COVID-19, failed to address people's broader concerns.

The authorities introduced multiple amendments to the Constitution, with the apparent purpose of removing legal restrictions on President Putin's participation in future presidential elections.

Russia maintained a strong influence on its immediate neighbours, and its occupation of Crimea and other territories continued.

RIGHT TO HEALTH

The COVID-19 pandemic placed further strain on the health care system, exposing chronic under-resourcing. A shortage of hospital beds, key protective and medical equipment and medications, together with the delayed wages of health workers, were frequently reported across the country. Official and independent numbers on infection and mortality rates varied greatly, indicating government under-reporting.

Health workers

Whistle-blowers from among health workers and other groups faced reprisals, including disciplinary measures and prosecution for "fake news".

Doctor Tatyana Revva was arbitrarily reprimanded and threatened with dismissal after she repeatedly complained about the shortage and inadequacy of protective equipment. Police considered and dismissed "fake news" allegations against her following a complaint from the hospital's head doctor.

Prison conditions

Health care and sanitary provisions in penitentiary institutions remained inadequate and further exacerbated by the pandemic. Although the authorities implemented restrictive and additional sanitary measures, they did not take measures to reduce the prison population. Official COVID-19 figures in custody were considered unreliable by independent monitors.

FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

Freedom of peaceful assembly remained constrained with further restrictions introduced in December. The rules relating to public assemblies and single-person pickets were further restricted in response to the pandemic, and some regions banned them outright. Public protests were typically small but regular, despite reprisals. There was a sharp increase in the numbers of single picketers arrested and prosecuted.

On 15 July, over a hundred peaceful protesters against constitutional changes were arbitrarily arrested and at least three severely beaten by the police in Moscow. Dozens were heavily fined or detained for five to 14 days.

The 9 July arrest of Sergey Furgal, who in 2018 had defeated the pro-Kremlin candidate to be elected Governor in the Far East Khabarovsk Region, prompted weekly peaceful mass protests in Khabarovsk as well as solidarity protests across Russia. Unusually, tens of thousands were allowed to march repeatedly in Khabarovsk before police made the first arrests on 18 July. On 10 October, police dispersed the protest for the first time, arresting at least 25 people, with at least five later sentenced to several days in detention. The protests in Khabarovsk were continuing at year's end.

In December, peaceful protester Konstantin Kotov was released following his imprisonment in 2019 for "repeated violation" of regulations on public assemblies. In January, the Constitutional Court had ordered a review of his case, and in April, the Moscow City Court reduced his sentence from four years to 18 months. Others prosecuted for the same offence included political activist Yulia Galyamina, who was given a two-year conditional sentence in December, activist Vyacheslav Egorov standing trial in Kolomna, and protester Aleksandr Prikhodko from Khabarovsk. In December, Aleksandr Prikhodko's case was dropped.

While police routinely used excessive and unnecessary force against protesters, they also allowed anti-protester violence by other groups. In Kushtau, Bashkiria, peaceful environmental activists who opposed a local mining project were repeatedly assaulted, with impunity, by private security staff, occasionally operating alongside police. Late on 9 August, around 30 private security guards and around 100 masked men attacked a camp of 10 environmental activists. Police were called but did not intervene. This triggered further local protests which forced the closure of the mining project in late August.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Restrictions on freedom of expression continued. On 1 April, amendments to the so-called "fake news" law, first passed in 2019, criminalized dissemination of "knowingly false information about circumstances posing a threat to the lives and security of citizens and/or about the government's actions to protect the population." Individuals face up to five years' imprisonment if dissemination of information leads to bodily harm or death, with hefty fines for the media. Hundreds of people were fined under administrative proceedings, and at least 37 faced criminal proceedings under this law, many of them critical civil activists, journalists or bloggers. At least five media outlets were prosecuted. The newspaper Novaya Gazeta and its chief editor were fined twice, in August and September, for publications about COVID-19 and ordered to delete respective articles online.

Journalists

Harassment, prosecution and physical attacks against journalists continued. On 30 June, police in Saint Petersburg assaulted reporter David Frenkel at a polling station and broke his arm. On 15 October, a journalist from Khabarovsk, Sergei Plotnikov, was abducted by masked men, driven to the woods, beaten and subjected to a mock execution. He reported the incident to the police once released but by year's end, he had not been informed about any investigation.

A journalist from Nizhniy Novgorod, Irina Slavina, faced routine harassment by the authorities. On 1 October, her home was raided and searched, and police summoned her as a witness in a criminal case against a local activist under the "undesirable organizations" law. On 2 October, she died after self-immolating in protest in front of the regional police headquarters.

On 6 July, a military court in Pskov convicted journalist Svetlana Prokopieva of "public justification of terrorism" and fined her RUB500,000 (US\$6,300) for her public comments on repressive policies that may have motivated a 17-year-old to blow himself up near the Federal Security Service building in Arkhangelsk.

Internet

Censorship of the internet continued. In June, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in Vladimir Kharitonov v. Russia and three other cases ruled that internet-blocking measures were "excessive and arbitrary" and violated the right to impart and receive information. A court in Moscow fined Google RUB1.5 million (US\$18,899) in August and RUB3 million (US\$40,580) in December for its search engine listing "dangerous content" banned by Russian authorities. In December, President Putin signed a law introducing sanctions on foreign internet platforms for blocking Russian media content. Another law passed in December introduced imprisonment for libel committed via the internet.

Repression of dissent

Opposition activists and other dissenting voices faced severe reprisals. As part of the

politically motivated criminal case against opposition leader Alexei Navalny's AntiCorruption Fund, 126 bank accounts belonging to his associates were frozen in January, followed by criminal and civil libel cases against Alexei Navalny and others. On 20 August, Alexei Navalny was taken ill on a flight from Tomsk. He was urgently hospitalized, and later flown to Germany where he was diagnosed with poisoning by a military-grade nerve agent. The Russian authorities failed to investigate the poisoning.

Siberian shaman Aleksandr Gabyshev, who had vowed to "purge" President Putin from the Kremlin, was on 12 May confined to a psychiatric hospital after he refused to be tested for COVID-19. He was discharged on 22 July following criticism in Russia and abroad.

In June, political blogger Nikolay Platoshkin was placed under house arrest on criminal charges of "calls to mass disturbances" and dissemination of "knowingly false information" for planning a peaceful protest against constitutional amendments.

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Harassment, prosecution, and physical attacks against human rights defenders remained commonplace.

Activists Alexandra Koroleva, in Kaliningrad, and Semyon Simonov, in Sochi, were charged and faced possible imprisonment for non-payment of arbitrary and heavy fines by their respective NGOs.

Journalist Elena Milashina and lawyer Marina Dubrovina were assaulted by a mob in a hotel in Grozny, Chechnya, on 6 February. A formal investigation started in March but was manifestly ineffective. Meanwhile, Chechen head Ramzan Kadyrov issued thinly veiled death threats against Elena Milashina, with impunity.

Lawyer Mikhail Benyash's appeal against his criminal conviction—which could lead to disbarment—started in October and was still ongoing at year's end.

FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION

Laws on "foreign agents" and "undesirable organizations" were actively used to smear independent NGOs, deprive them of funding and severely penalize their members. In December, further draconian legislative changes were signed into law, including to extend the "foreign agents" provisions to NGOs staff, unregistered groups and individuals.

In April, the education NGO Projectoria was forced to register as a "foreign agent" to avoid fines while its foreign donor, Project Harmony, was declared "undesirable".

In October, activist Yana Antonova from Krasnodar was sentenced to 240 hours of forced labour for association with an "undesirable organization", re-posting Open Russia-branded materials online and taking part in single person pickets. She was subsequently fined again under new administrative proceedings.

FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND BELIEF

The prosecution of Jehovah's Witnesses under "extremism" charges escalated, including in occupied Crimea, with a growing number of convictions, and longer sentences. At year's end, 362 people were under investigation or standing trial, 39 had been convicted and six were imprisoned. Artem Gerasimov, for example, was sentenced on appeal in June to six years' imprisonment and a fine of RUB400,000 (US\$5,144) by the de facto Supreme Court of Crimea.

TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT

Torture and other ill-treatment remained pervasive, and the number of perpetrators convicted was negligible. Prosecutions were typically for "abuse of authority" and resulted in lenient sentences.

Twelve former prison officers from Yaroslavl colony were sentenced to up to four years and three months' imprisonment after a leaked video showed an inmate being beaten in 2017. Six of them were immediately released on account of time already spent in detention. The former head and deputy head of the colony were acquitted.

UNFAIR TRIALS

Violations of the right to a fair trial remained common. Detainees were denied meetings with their lawyers and a number of trials continued to be closed to the public, with the COVID-19 pandemic being often abusively used as a justification.

In February and June respectively, seven young men from Penza, and two from Saint Petersburg, received sentences of up to 18 years' imprisonment under trumped-up terrorism charges over their purported involvement with a non-existent organization called "Network". Numerous allegations of torture and other ill-treatment, and of fabrication of evidence, were ignored.

Constitutional and legislative amendments further eroded the right to a fair trial, including by giving the President power to nominate the judges of the Constitutional and Supreme Courts, and initiate the appointment of all federal judges and dismissal of senior federal judges.

Counter-terrorism

Counterterrorism legislation was widely abused, often to target dissent.

Journalist Abdulmumin Gadzhiev, from Dagestan, remained in custody under fabricated charges of financing terrorism and participation in terrorist and extremist organizations. His trial started in November.

In occupied Crimea, allegations of membership of the Islamist organization Hizb-ut-Tahrir (labelled as a "terrorist" movement by Russia in 2003) were widely used to imprison ethnic Crimean Tatars. In June, Crimean human rights defender Emir-Usein Kuku lost the appeal against his 12-year prison sentence. In September, another Crimean human rights defender, Server Mustafayev, was sentenced to 14 years in prison.

In September, 19 men from Ufa, Bashkira, convicted for alleged Hiz-ut-Tahrir membership and sentenced to between 10 and 24 years, lost their appeal, with one defendant's sentence reduced by a year.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

Proposals to introduce legislation on domestic violence remained stalled in Parliament, while NGOs reported a sharp increase in domestic violence following COVID-19 lockdown measures.

In June, the ECtHR held a *Polshina v. Russia* that deficiencies in the legal system related to domestic violence violated the prohibitions of torture and discrimination. The Court underlined Russia's consistent failure to investigate abuse, and years-long tolerance of "a climate which was conducive to domestic violence".

RIGHTS OF LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER AND INTERSEX (LGBTI) PEOPLE

LGBTI people continued to face discrimination and persecution. Constitutional amendments redefined marriage as a "union between a man and woman", reinforcing existing limitations on same-sex couples.

LGBTI rights activist Yulia Tsvetkova was fined RUB75,000 (US\$1,014) for posting online her drawings in support of same-sex couples and faced other penalties, including ongoing prosecution for pornography relating to her body positive drawings featuring female genitalia.

MIGRANTS' RIGHTS

Over a third of foreign labour migrants reported having lost work owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, and thousands were stranded in Russia due to related border closures. In April, a presidential decree eased work permit and residency rules for mi-

grants and refugees, and temporarily suspended forcible returns of foreign and stateless individuals. Some regional authorities ceased temporary detention of migrants, although new decisions on forcible returns were also reported.

UNLAWFUL ATTACKS

Evidence including witness statements, videos, photographs and satellite imagery of seven air strikes against medical facilities and schools by Russian forces, and four by Syrian or Russian forces, between May 2019 and February 2020 in Syria, corroborated allegations of serious violations of international humanitarian law amounting to war crimes.

Ms. KAPTUR. Madam Speaker, a successful meeting with Putin can only be accomplished proceeding from a position of strength.

While I am deeply concerned the administration waived Nord Stream 2 sanctions, I am pleased President Biden invited President Zelensky to a White House visit. I am also grateful the administration announced \$150 million in security assistance to Ukraine.

This week, President Biden has an opportunity to pivot from the Trump administration's disastrous legacy that left the transatlantic relationship in tatters. The Congress and our caucus stand ready to work with the administration to counter Russian aggression by increasing Ukraine's security and democracy assistance.

Onward liberty. Onward Ukraine.

OFFERING SYMPATHY

(Ms. JACKSON LEE asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Madam Speaker, I rise as a fellow Texan to offer my deepest sympathy to my fellow congressional colleagues in the Austin area, to the local officials, and to all of those who suffered the brutality of the mass shooting in the last couple of days—14—and my deepest sympathy to the family of the deceased loved one, who mourns today.

Out of respect for his family, I will just simply say we mourn him, and we are saddened by his loss.

Madam Speaker, in Texas, the Governor just signed a permitless gun bill. All statistics suggest that this provides for a shopping spree of guns.

It is important for three things to happen for our Nation to raise its voices against gun violence and to begin to pass sensible gun safety laws, including my legislation for gun storage, universal background checks, closing the Charleston loophole, to prevent ghost guns, and banning assault weapons.

At the same time, we must raise up the specter of mental health services. But most of all, as I chair the Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security, we must raise our voice against violence and actually deal with it and try to cease it. I believe America must do this.

CELEBRATING JUNETEENTH

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Ms. JACOBS of California). Under the Speak-

er's announced policy of January 4, 2021, the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON LEE) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

GENERAL LEAVE

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Madam Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on the subject of this Special Order.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentlewoman from Texas?

There was no objection.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Madam Speaker, I rise this evening for the Congressional Black Caucus Special Order hour that deals with, of course, Juneteenth, a very special time that I am delighted—with the leadership of our chair, Congresswoman JOYCE BEATTY; and, of course, my coanchor, Congressman TORRES of New York—that we stand here to provide this kind of leadership for this Congress and for this Nation.

Let me extend my heartfelt appreciation for all of the leadership that have given us this time, including Speaker PELOSI and, of course, Leader HOYER, and to acknowledge the significance to African Americans as it relates to Juneteenth.

Coming from Texas, let me tell you that Juneteenth, a couple days from today, will be an amazing commemoration. We will be unveiling a mural in Galveston, where General Granger first came. I believe thousands will come. And if there will not be thousands, let you hear my voice: Thousands should come because what a historic moment.

What does Juneteenth mean?

It means an acknowledgment of those who were in bondage for over 200 years. The Emancipation Proclamation—which, by the way, for the 150th commemoration, because we had not finished our congressional work, I was actually here at midnight—which is when President Abraham Lincoln signed it at the National Archives. Looking at the original Emancipation Proclamation, what a sense of emotion.

But then to let you know that that did not free all of the slaves. Two years in bondage continued for those west of the Mississippi and many States until General Granger reached the shores of Galveston, still marked today in Texas, that said that you were free.

Can you imagine? Two extra years of bondage. Couldn't get out. Couldn't read a newspaper or hold up a message that had come from your relative that lived in Georgia. Couldn't do anything.

General Granger read these words of General Order Number 3, set off a joyous celebration of the freed men and women of Texas. I have no shame that it was called Jubilee. And there were a lot of picnics and what we called in the later years "red punch."